Sylvia.
Mary

Hyattstown, Maryland 20734
January 12, 1967

Mr. Joseph A. Ball
Ball, Hunt and Hart
Counsellors at Law
Long Beach, California 90800

Dear Mr. Ball:

Slander is the refuge of scoundrels, evasion the defense of bankrupt cowards.

From The New York Times of January 3 I take it you were referring to me when you spoke of "scandal mongers who have been writing scurrilous books" about the Warren Report. According to the Times, you were specific in your reference to "literary scavengers" and included me.

It is easy to be very brave and slander with the breadth of a continent between us. It is also easy to avoid confrontation with me. All you need do is to keep the continent between us, as you have.

On the fifth of December I was in the New York TV studio where the former counsel of the former Commission were to have had the program they had demanded. You were not. Neither was a single one of your colleagues. Is it not strange that, if all I am is a chicken farmer, which is what those who heard you speak derived from your remarks, and you people demanded that program, none of you would participate once it was known that only a chicken farmer would oppose you? It is to me a reflection of something other than conviction of righteousness that none of you eminent lawyers would confront a single chicken farmer.

It is also strange to me that you have now found the courage to say what you found it inexpedient to say when I was in California and could have answered you. Or is that the reason?

This is not the only such case. Last Friday I expected to meet one of your colleagues in a TV studio 700 miles from here. He had accepted the station's invitation before they asked me. He was not there. And there have been many other cases.

Your avoidance of specifics in your complaint is as eloquent as your preference for only long-distance slanders.

I have no doubt that much of what I have discovered is "new evidence" to the members of the Commission. It certainly is entirely new if one is to seek it in the Report. But in any event, what is wrong with the "old" evidence that was ignored, misrepresented, even destroyed? Your thin plaint is like that of an errant husband who denounces marriage when he is never home long enough to find out what his wife is.

You charge me with distortion. May I challenge you to prove this from my book?

It is also odd how you define as "literary scavengers" only those who have shown how miserably you failed the country. It is not Louis

Nizer, who wrote the introduction to the Doubleday edition of the Report (nor is it Doubleday, which made a commercial venture of it, with Mr. Nizer's assistance). It is not Congressman Ford, who put his name to the first printed book on the work of the Commission, who put his name to an article in Life reporting on the Report (and not entirely in consonance with it on a most basic point). It is not the long list of former associates of the late President, like Messrs. Schlesinger, Sorensen, Salinger and Fay, or Mrs. Lincoln or Nanny Shaw. Nor is it William Manchester, who "for openers" got more than $665,000 for four magazine articles, nor Look, which paid it and used these articles to cover an increase in price. When you get to be a millionaire, you are not a scavenger, are you, Mr. Ball (as long as you are willing to say wrong is right)?

And, naturally, you are not a scavenger if you are Jacob Cohen, wrongly identified as now a member of the faculty of Yale University, even if one of your defenses of the Commission and its Report is that all four bullets taken from Officer Tippit's body were ballistically proved to have been fired from Oswald's pistol.

Nor are you a scavenger if you are Wesley Liebeler who, like the fox who got himself hired to guard the chicken house, now has the taxpayers subsidizing his own "investigation" of himself, saying in advance it is time for an "impartial" report. Is it idle to suggest that most of us expected the official Report to have been impartial? What else did we pay for?

Of course, if you are a lawyer getting $100 a day and leaving more questions behind than you answer and answering none of the main ones with dependability or finality, you are not a scavenger. You are, however, a scavenger if you have no income, make no profit and go in debt in an effort to bring justice from injustice, right from wrong, if you try to recapture the national honor.

You use your dictionary; I'll use mine.

Meanwhile, you have made slanderous charges against me. I think it is not expecting too much to ask a factual substantiation of them.

Nor do I think it is too much to look forward to hearing from some of the good citizens of California (if I do not read it in The New York Times) that you have made a speech in which you refer to General Eisenhower as a bull merchant, Governor Rockefeller as a gas-station operator, President Truman as a retired former sales clerk, Governor Romney as an ex-mechanic, Lyndon Johnson as a former elevator operator, and, of course, your Governor and Senator as ex-"hams". Then I will know you speak with the voice of a man of honorable intent.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg